

Decreasing the Officer Accession Standard to Meet the 202k
Manpower Requirement?

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Introduction

The President of the United States authorized the Marine Corps to increase its total strength from 180,000 to 202,000 by Fiscal Year 2012 (202k increase).¹ From FY 1996 to 2006 the average number of second lieutenants accessed each year was 1,357.² Throughout the next 5 years (to include FY 2008), the number of officer accessions will average 1,994 per year; this is an average increase of over 600 officers per year as compared with the previous decade. Nevertheless, to achieve this 32% increase, the Marine Corps cannot afford to decrease its standard for commissioning officers.³ The Marine Corps must continue to maintain its historical standard for providing highly qualified second lieutenants for service in the operating forces by upholding the strict recruiting, commissioning, and Basic School graduation requirements.

Main Body

¹ Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps End Strength Increase*, ALMAR Number 0008/07, Washington, DC: 06 February 2007, URL: <<http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/2007/MARINE%20CORPS%20END%20STRENGTH%20INCREASE.aspx>>, Accessed 5 December 2008.

² *Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report*, n.d., Attachment to email from Master Sergeant Bartlett to author, November 2008, Slide 10.

³ *Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report*, Slide 10.

Background and Generational Characteristics

Current projections indicate that the Marine Corps will meet its enlisted 202k manpower goal by FY 2010, two years ahead of schedule. Officer manpower goals are projected to be met by FY 2012. "Even though 202,000 is in sight, it will take some time for the Corps to balance the force. While robust recruiting and re-enlistment efforts have grown the number of enlisted troops by thousands ahead of schedule, it will be 2011 before the necessary increase in officers is met."⁴ Recruiting an average of 600 more officer candidates per year through FY 2012 as compared with the previous decade is a significant undertaking as the Marine Corps Recruiting Command has been charged with the following accession mission: FY 2009 - 2,050; FY 2010 - 2,100; FY 2011- 1,959; and FY 2012 - 1,959.⁵

During this process, all Marine leaders, particularly recruiters, OCS and TBS instructors, must understand the generational characteristics of its newest Marines and the uniqueness of Generation Y, to be successful in increasing the overall force size. Persons born between 1982 and 2001 are members of Generation Y which is also referred to as the

⁴Dan Lamothe's "Marine Corps on the way to 202K", *Marine Corps Times*, online ed., 2 November 2008, URL: <http://www.marine_corps_news.com/200811/marine_corps_on_the_way_to_202.htm> Accessed 5 December 2008.

⁵*Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report*, Slide 10.

"Millennial" or "Net" Generation.⁶ "A 2008 survey by the UK recruitment consultancy FreshMinds Talent in partnership with *Management Today* suggested that Generation Y members are more ambitious, brand conscious and tend to move jobs more often than previous generations."⁷ They are also called the "Trophy Generation"⁸ referring to the "nobody loses and everyone gets a thanks for participating trophy"⁹ attitude associated with their generation. Furthermore, this generation questioned their parents and the status quo and challenged conventional command and control management styles.¹⁰ The nation's newest job seekers and potential officer candidates are "more interested in making their jobs accommodate their family and personal lives. They want jobs with flexibility, telecommuting options and the ability to go part time or leave the workforce temporarily when children are in the picture."¹¹ They are a technically savvy and reliant generation and have a "nearly intimate connection to technology."¹² However, employers are "concerned that members of Generation Y have too great expectations from the workplace and

⁶ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia. Online ed., 2008. "Generation Y. Web only essay. n.d. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_Y>, Reference from Molly Tovar's *Getting it Right: Graduate Schools Respond to the Millennial Challenge*, Accessed 15 November 2008.

⁷ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, Online ed. Reference from *Work 2.0 Survey-My Generation. MT FreshMinds*. Accessed 15 November 2008.

⁸ Stephanie Armour, "Generation Y: They've Arrived at work with a new Attitude", *USA Today* online ed., 6 November 2005, URL <http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm> Accessed 15 November 2008.

⁹ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, Online ed.

¹⁰ Stephanie Armour, "Generation Y: They've Arrived at work with a new Attitude", *USA Today* online ed., 6 November 2005, URL <http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm> Accessed 15 November 2008.

¹¹ Stephanie Armour, "Generation Y: They've Arrived at work with a new Attitude"

¹² Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, Online ed.

desire to shape their jobs to fit their lives rather than adapt their lives to the workplace".¹³

Officer Recruiting

Throughout its history, the Marine Corps' recruiting mantra has effectively prided itself on offering challenges, leadership opportunities, and the chance to serve amongst the nation's elite warriors. Currently, however, the Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) has resorted to incentive based recruiting tactics in order to meet its increased officer manpower demands. Within its incentive arsenal, the Marine Corps has four main programs that will assist in recruiting and retaining highly qualified candidates for the next five years: Marine Corps Tuition Assistance Program, Financial Assistance Program, Officer Accession Incentive Program and College Loan Repayment Program.¹⁴

The Marine Corps Tuition Assistance Program (MCTAP) aids platoon leaders class (PLC) candidates that have successfully completed one summer of training at Officer Candidates School (OCS). The program provides \$5,200 per academic year and needs to be paid back only if the commission is not accepted. The Financial Assistance Program (FAP) is also aimed at assisting

¹³ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia. Online ed. Reference from Ron Alsop's *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*

¹⁴ *Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report*, Slide 27.

and retaining PLC candidates that have returned to college following a summer of training at OCS. FAP provides \$350 per month for college-related expenses, but unlike MCTAP, FAP does not have to be used solely for tuition. The officer accession incentive (OAI) is a \$4,000 lump-sum payment for second lieutenants commissioned from the Officer Candidates Class (OCC) Program. The payment is received upon reporting to The Basic School. And finally, the most lucrative incentive program that the Marine Corps offers is the College Loan Repayment Program (CLRP). The CLRP offers 100% college loan reimbursement (up to \$30,000) after reporting to The Basic School, and participation in the CLRP does not preclude eligibility for the Montgomery GI Bill.¹⁵

These incentive-based recruiting and retention tools will continue to assist officer selection officers (OSOs) in recruiting highly qualified potential Marine Corps officers, especially given the current bleak state of the national economy. Nevertheless, these monetary entitlements earned by successful post-training officer candidates are certainly not the sole reason for signing-up for Officer Candidates School (OCS). However, the incentives will support the OSOs in meeting their challenging mission for the next five years.

¹⁵*Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report, Slide 27.*

In the first year of the 202k increase (FY 2008), the Marine Corps officer accession goal of 1,900 was reached - an increase of 365 from FY 2007.¹⁶ Despite the notable increase, the SAT scores, physical fitness levels, and college grade point averages of FY 2008 officer candidates were consistent with historical standards.¹⁷ MCRC shipped 2,564 candidates to the OCS summer training cycle, 400 more than the historical norm.¹⁸ Of those 2,564 candidates, 2,390 (93.2%) were inducted into training as compared with the 94.6% historical induction standard.¹⁹ The 1% difference is negligible but may likely be attributed to potential candidates having less time to prepare with OSOs. Of the 174 potential candidates that were not inducted into the summer training cycle, 103 (59%) were determined *Not Physically Qualified*, 46 (26%) failed the Initial Physical Fitness Test, and 25 (15%) *Dropped on Request* prior to meeting their sergeant instructors.²⁰ Overall, OSOs met the increased requirements without sacrificing quality, a trend that should continue for the upcoming years.

Commissioning and Officer Candidates School (OCS)

¹⁶Marine Corps Recruiting Command Officer Programs Power Point Report, Slide 2.

¹⁷Material in this section is based on the author's personal experience as OCS permanent staff member from 2006 to 2008.

¹⁸Captain Michael Sandstrom's OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report, n.d., Attachment to email from Captain Michael Sandstrom to author, November 2008, Slide 4.

¹⁹Captain Michael Sandstrom's OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report, Slide 4.

²⁰Captain Michael Sandstrom's OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report, Slide 6,7.

According to Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, OCS "must continue to build thinking, decisive, innovative Marines, imbued with initiative and empowered to act within the construct of commander's intent and in the face of potentially confusing, chaotic and unclear situations."²¹ OCS is responsible for training, screening, and evaluating the leadership potential of the Corps' potential second lieutenants and does so by testing the physical, mental, and moral capacity of the participants to ensure they possess the qualities required for commissioning. OCS is a high stress, high tempo training environment that has been highly efficient in screening those who are not qualified to be Marine officers. Within the officer entry-level training pipeline which includes OSOs, OCS and TBS, OCS is where the most intensive and subjective screening process occurs. If an ill-qualified second lieutenant is commissioned, OCS is likely held responsible.²²

Summer cycle 2008 statistics indicate that OCS, at least during the initial year of the 202k increase, has maintained numbers consistent with the previous five years and has not altered its standard in the midst of the 202k increase. Of the 2,390 candidates that were inducted into the 2008 OCS summer

²¹ Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 20.

²² Material in this section is based on the author's personal experience as OCS permanent staff member from 2006 to 2008.

training cycle, 1,933 graduated.²³ The summer 2008 overall graduation rate was 80.8% but the graduation rate varied by program. For example, 92% graduated from the PLC-Jr and PLC-Sr courses while 66% graduated from the OCC programs. Disparity amongst graduation rates of different programs is historically common because programs are based upon commissioning sources which are predicated on experience level.

On average, 3.8% fewer candidates successfully competed summer OCS training than in the previous four years. Of the 457 candidates that failed to complete the program, 146 (31%) were found not physically qualified (NPQ) to continue training due to an injury.²⁴ The majority of NPQs were training-related injuries to include shoulder, knee, ankle, and shin injuries.²⁵ The majority of disenrolled candidates, 208 (45%), were performance-based disenrollments highlighted by deficiencies in leadership, academics, physical fitness, character or a combination. Performance attrition trends included leadership deficiencies (89).²⁶ The leadership disenrollments included notable maturity shortcomings in relation to peer group and integrity violations especially among prior enlisted service members (8 of the 21 total cases). Poor academic performance accounted for 29 of the

²³Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 4.

²⁴Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 9.

²⁵Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 10.

²⁶Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 11,12.

disenrolled candidates and below-standard physical fitness accounted for 90 disenrolled candidates.²⁷ Ninety-nine candidates requested to drop from the program for multiple reasons,²⁸ and 14 candidates were disenrolled for other reasons, which include family-emergency-type situations.²⁹

Based on the quality of participant inducted into OCS training and graduation percentages, the OCS evaluation process appears to have been actually more rigid during summer 2008. The difference may be attributed to OSOs inability to spend quality time with every candidate based on faster ship times and increased requirements.

The Basic School

TBS is forged with the challenge "to train and educate newly commissioned officers in the high standards of professional knowledge, esprit-de-corps, and leadership in order to prepare them for duty as company grade officers in the operating forces, with particular emphasis on the duties, responsibilities and war fighting skills required of a rifle platoon commander."³⁰ The course of instruction covers 26 weeks,

²⁷ Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 12.

²⁸ Captain Michael Sandstrom's *OCS Summer 08 Roll-Up Power Point Report*, Slide 13.

²⁹ Material in this section is based on the author's personal experience as OCS permanent staff member from 2006 to 2008

³⁰ *TBS Command Final Brief Power Point Report*, n.d., Attachment to email from Captain Robert Crawford to author, November 2008, Slide 2.

which includes 900 hours of classroom instruction and 600 hours of field training.

From FY 2005 - 2007, the average number of students that started TBS each year was 1,561(including 190 students in the Warrant Officer Basic Course). During that same period, approximately 100 students (6.3%) per year were recycled to another class for failing to meet the standards of performance, academics, physical fitness, or due to an injury. An additional 8 commissions were revoked due to negligence. Based on limited statistics from FY 2008 (600 students), 34 students (5.67%) were recycled and four commissions were revoked, clearly indicating consistency amongst evaluation procedures and standards.³¹

Maintaining the Standard

The Marine Corps understands the importance of maintaining historically consistent officer accession standards despite the requirement for more officers. OSOs, OCS and TBS successfully handled the increased FY 2008 officer through-put as officer accession performance percentage differences were negligible during the initial year of the 202k increase as compared to the previous decade. The monetary incentive programs coupled with the sluggish national economy should bode well for continued

³¹ Revoke-Recycle Percents 04 to 07-3 Power Point Report, n.d., Attachment to email from Captain Robert Crawford to author, November 2008.

success in meeting the recruiting requirements. OCS has been staffed with additional sergeant instructors, platoon sergeants, platoon commanders, and support personnel to ensure a historically consistent evaluation process.

Eliminating the policy of [Drop on Request] from OCS and other suggestions that alter the historically efficient and proven methods of the officer accession process in order to increase the chances that the Marine Corps will reach its 202k officer manpower requirements should not be implemented. Varying officer accession procedures and requirements in lieu of the 202k increase at OSO stations, OCS, and TBS is unwarranted. The statistics from FY08 indicate that the Marine Corps will succeed in achieving its goals utilizing its current officer accession processes and continue to provide highly qualified second lieutenants for service in the operating forces.

Counter Argument

Mission accomplishment has always been the hallmark of the Marine Corps. Regardless of what it takes to meet the manpower goals associated with 202k increase, the Marine Corps will succeed, even if it means decreasing the officer accession standards. Diminishing the standards by allowing a few extra candidates or students to graduate OCS or TBS could easily go

unnoticed by outsiders. Furthermore, the majority of potential candidates are members of Generation Y. Generation Y characteristics are not necessarily consistent with pro-military service ideals and, therefore, could present a significant challenge in attracting potential candidates to the OSO stations. The inherent challenges of accessing 600 more officers per year coupled with the generational characteristics of the majority of the pool will dilute the overall quality of the second lieutenants entering the operating forces.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps' proven ability to adapt to constantly changing requirements and situations will be tested again during the later stages of the 202k increase. The officer accession process maintained its rigidity and its historical standard during the initial stage of the 202k increase because of its leadership at all levels within MCRC, OCS and TBS. Its ability to sustain effectiveness during the upcoming four years in producing highly effective second lieutenants for service in the operating forces will significantly impact current and future operations.

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